

Diarrhoea

Minor Ailment

What is diarrhoea?

Diarrhea is a condition where loose, watery stools are passed for more than three times a day. This causes loss of water and salts from the body and may lead to dehydration, which is also known as an excessive water loss from your body.

What are the possible causes of this condition?

The causes of diarrhoea can vary from person to person and may include the following:

- Unable to tolerate certain food e.g. dairy products such as milk
- Infection by organisms such as bacteria or viruses
- Medical conditions such as an inflammatory bowel disease where there is long term inflammation in the intestines
- Medications such as antibiotics or some antacids
- Contact with contaminated food or other infected persons

What are the symptoms of diarrhoea?

The symptoms of this condition can include the following:

- Increased need to pass stools
- Loose and watery stools
- Stomach cramps

In some cases, you may experience symptoms of dehydration if you lose excessive amounts of water from your body. Symptoms of dehydration include:

- Having a dry mouth and feeling thirsty
- Dizziness
- Lack of energy
- Muscle cramps
- Feeling irritable

In serious cases of dehydration, this may cause seizures and damage to the kidneys, heart and brain. Symptoms of serious dehydration include:

- Extreme thirst
- Confusion
- Feeling faint
- Lack of urination in adults
- Lack of wet diaper for more than 3 hours (for children less than 2 years old)
- Fast breathing and heart rate

What can I do to treat diarrhoea?

Diarrhoea can be treated in the following ways and you can approach your pharmacist to get the following medications:

- Charcoal
- Diphenoxylate/Atropine
- Dioctahedral smectite
- Loperamide
- Kaolin
- Oral rehydration salts
- Probiotics

When do I need to see a doctor?

Although diarrhoea can be treated without a doctor's consultation, there are times where the condition might be more serious.

If your condition does not get better in a few days or gets worse, you should see a doctor. You should also see a doctor if you experience any of the following:

- For an adult
 - Diarrhea that lasts for more than 3 days with medication
 - Symptoms of dehydration
 - Very bad pain in the stomach or anus area
 - Blood in the stools or black and sticky stools
 - Fever above 39 °C
- For a child
 - No wet diaper for more than 3 hours (for children less than 2 years old)
 - Dry mouth or cries without tears
 - Unresponsive or sleepy
 - Stomach, eyes or cheeks look sunken
 - Diarrhoea lasts for more than 3 days
 - You observe the child showing symptoms of dehydration
 - Very bad pain in the stomach or anus area
 - Blood in the stools or black and sticky stools

What else can I do to manage this condition?

Other than using medications to treat the condition, diarrhoea can also be managed by the following methods:

- Drink more water or clear fluids such as clear soups to prevent losing too much water. If you are unable to tolerate fluids because you feel nauseous, you may also suck on ice chips.
- Avoid alcohol or caffeine which can worsen your diarrhoea
- Avoid fatty, oily, food high in fibre and dairy products such as milk or cheese as they may irritate your stomach

The following are some suggestions to prevent diarrhoea from happening again:

- Always wash your hands before and after meals
- Eat food that is well-cooked
- Avoid street food
- Avoid raw meat, fish and seafood unless you are sure that they are freshly prepared
- Avoid placing cooked food on plates that were used to place raw meat
- Drink bottled water if water that is safe to drink is not available

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